STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

On Our Way Home: Documenting Life on the Streets

Homeless photographers create an eye-opening exhibit to document the dire conditions endured by people living on the streets of Oakland.

by Lydia Gans

Among the many galleries and outdoor shows, food vendors, performers and general fun activities on Oakland's First Friday in May was an exhibit at Uptown Body and Fender called "On Our Way Home." It is a moving and inspiring series of photographs and statements by and about the lives of eight formerly homeless men in Oakland.

In contrast to most displays in galleries and museums, the photographers in this case were not professionals living in comfort and security while standing back and documenting the lives of "others." They were homeless or recently homeless senior men who had lived on the streets and personally suffered the inhumane conditions they were documenting.

Each photographer had experienced the trauma of not having a place to rest and sleep, a place where they were safe from inclement weather and hostile attacks, a secure place to keep their possessions. They had experienced the deprivation of poverty as they wandered from place to place with their shopping carts, trying to obtain food and get their most basic needs met.

They were caught in a web of hopelessness and loneliness, all too often despising their own lives.

Their lives changed when they enrolled in the winter shelter program at St. Mary's Senior Center in Oakland. St. Mary's Center serves as a temporary home and provides meals, health care, help in finding permanent housing, and various programs and services. It also provides a community where the seniors acquire the skills and develop confidence in their own ability to redirect their lives.

Artist and photographer Taryn Evans developed the concept for the photography project. She found that Oakland has the highest percentage of homeless seniors in the country.

"It was just astounding," she recalled. She became determined to make people aware of the extent of poverty on the streets of Oakland. "I want to bring the everyday lives of homeless seniors living in Oakland, California, to the public."

Evans secured a grant to provide a number of homeless seniors with disposable cameras and pay them a stipend to go out and take photographs. The aim was to prepare an exhibit that would tell the public, in words and pictures, about the plight, as well as the humanity, of people who are poor and homeless in our community.

Evans connected with St. Mary's Center. For Susan Werner, art facilitator and social worker at the Center, it was an ideal opportunity. Eight men who had gone through St. Mary's program participated in the project. They went out in the neighborhoods to take pictures.

"A Need for Advocacy." **Guitar Whitfield took this photo of a homeless man in a nearby park. " I want everyone to have a decent life in America. People are running around hungry and homeless. People need to help one another."** Guitar Whitfield photo

We must make it possible for all people to find their way home. It often takes years to find decent housing.

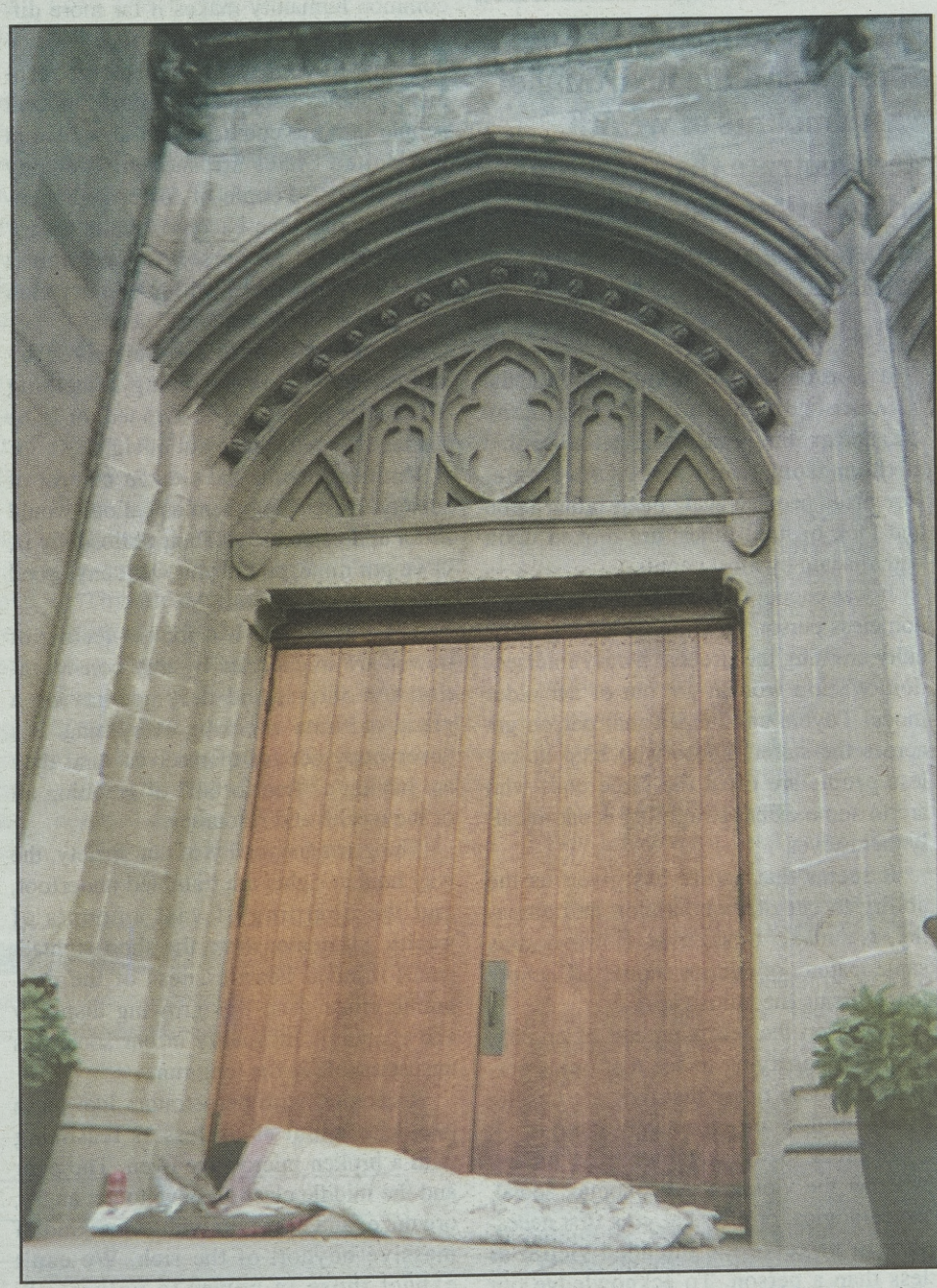
For six weeks, they met weekly after lunch with Susan Werner and Taryn Evans to share their experiences and select their most compelling photographs to be prepared for the exhibit. Then Evans had their images enlarged and Werner had them framed and prepared for the show.

The show is one way to bring awareness of the situation of poor and homeless seniors to the public. But just as important, if not more so, is the huge positive effect that creating this exhibit has had on the men who participated. It was this experience that made it possible for them to look back and talk about what their lives had been like on the streets.

Werner explained, "I think that when we go through traumatic experiences, it's hard to take a look at oneself when you're still in it. So here they had had an experience and moved through it, so their reflecting was based on the security and the accomplishment and the safety of their own home. That makes such a difference for someone to be able to talk about such a difficult experience."

The photographers write and talk of how their lives have changed, what they have learned and can give back to the community. The title of the show, "On Our Way Home," Werner recalls, seemed

See **On Our Way Home** *page 6*



"Heavenly Threshold." **A homeless man in a church doorway.** Pedro Del Norte photo

First Bay Area Transgender Shelter Aims to Open Doors with Community's Help

Due to the harassment, abuse, and neglect they have encountered in shelters, transgender people in the Bay Area have been forced to live on the streets.

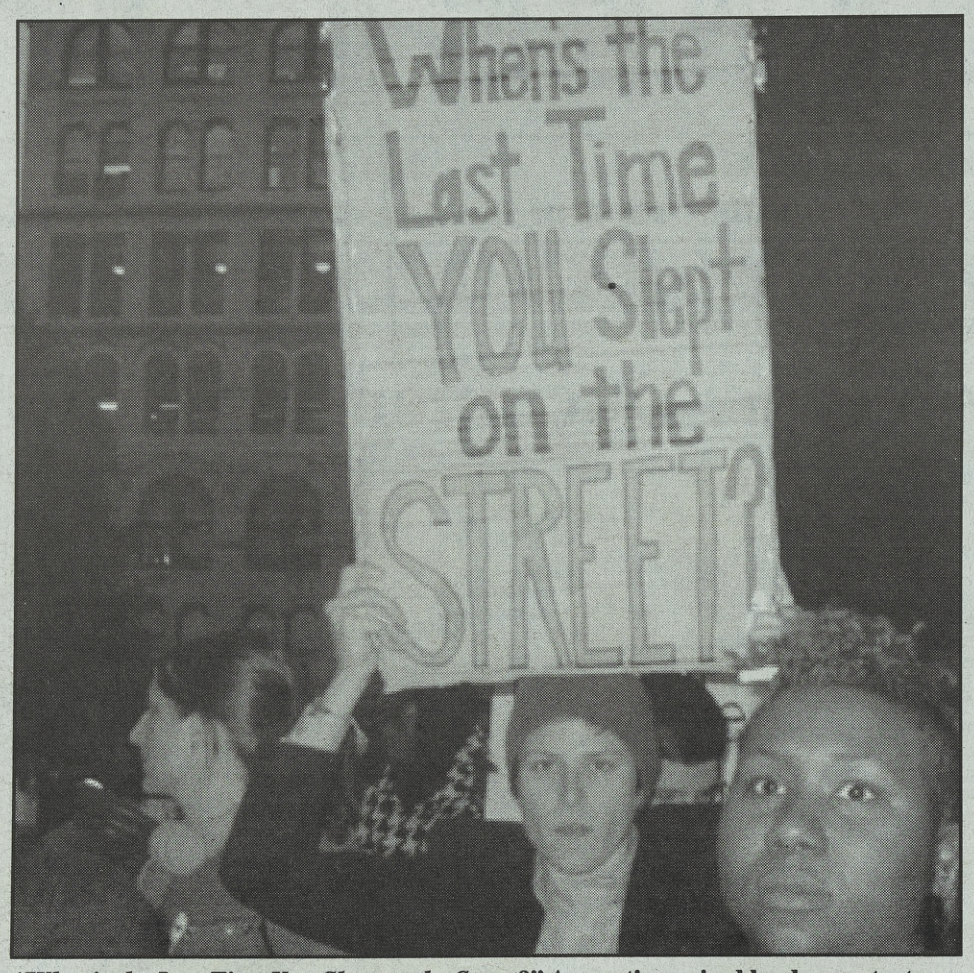
Transgender women are specifically impacted by the lack of safe or affordable housing, while experiencing high rates of discrimination in employment and education.

With the help of the community, all of that will soon change. Queens Cottage Shelter and Transitions House, a trans housing advocacy group, plan to open the area's first housing program for transgender women. Queens Cottage Shelter and Transitions House are partnering with local organizations, including the SF LGBT Center's Trans Employment Program (TEEI), an initiative that provides career and educational services to the trans community.

Breezy Golden-Farr, founder of Queens Cottage Shelter, and Clair Farley, Transitions House founder and associate director of economic development at the SF LGBT Center, recently started a crowdfunding campaign on IndieGoGo.com.

Initially, Queens Cottage Shelter's goal was to raise $5,000. The community took interest in this one-of-a-kind project, and Queen's Cottage Shelter raised almost $10,000 by the end of the first week.

Queens Cottage Shelter and Transitions House hopes to make their dream a reality with the continued support of crowd funders. The organizations hope to raise $20,000 to offer shelter, food, connections to local resources and a safe *haven to transgender women in the area.*



"When's the Last Time You Slept on the Street?" **A question raised by demonstrators calling for shelter, housing and services for transgender youth who are homeless.**

A first of its kind, Queens Cottage Shelter will be the only shelter for transgender women in Oakland, Calif. In partnership with Transitions House and the community, Queens Cottage Shelter hopes to open its doors and provide stable housing and referrals to community resources to trans women in the area.

Contact Transitions House and Queens Cottage Shelter

Clair Farley, SF LGBT Center
Email: clairf@sfcenter.org
Phone: (415) 865-5632
IndieGoGo.com Campaign:
https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/trans-housing-now-queens-cottage-shelter

National Campaign for Youth Shelter

The National Campaign for Youth Shelter is being launched in partnership by the National Coalition for the Homelessness and the Ali Forney Center. The New York-based Ali Forney Center has worked with numerous organizations to put together a huge rally for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness.

LGBTQ youths are disproportionately over-represented in the homeless youth population, with as many as 40 percent of the nation's homeless youth being LGBTQ. It is important to remember this devastating statistic during Pride Month and to band together to effect change for ALL young people.

Over the course of the campaign, we are determined to see:

1. A federal commitment to provide ALL young people, ages 24 and under, with immediate access to safe shelter.

2. An immediate commitment to add 22,000 shelter beds along with appropriate services — a five-fold increase over the current level of resources.

3. A more accurate and comprehensive effort to count the number of homeless youth in the nation in order to determine the number of beds that are needed over the next decade.

In order to see improvements in the lives of young people experiencing homelessness, we must all work together and speak out! Please use your voice to help others understand the gravity of this issue.

For more information, please visit the National Campaign for Youth Shelter web page: http://www.nationalcampaignforyouthshelter.org

— from *The Advocate* by the National Coalition for the Homeless.

The Ruthless Elites at the Top of the Pyramid

The gross inequality of our society, and the hoarding of vast amounts of wealth, demonstrate the short-sighted heartlessness of the economic and political elites.

by Jack Bragen

It is astoundingly unfortunate that the more "down and out" someone appears, the more abuse gets shoveled at them from people more fortunate. Homeless people, who have fallen upon bad luck or hard times, are looked upon with disdain by most people.

It was encouraging to me when I saw a homeless person on crutches having difficulty crossing the street at a busy intersection, when a woman got out of her older model Toyota and helped that person get across the street. Those who help homeless people are often the same ones who are to some extent struggling economically themselves.

It seems that nature has given us the ability to cut off compassion and empathy, as a matter of survival. However, this same instinct of cutting people off is now jeopardizing the human species.

When on the receiving end of cruelty, it can be horrifying to see that one's perpetrator doesn't care that they are hurting you — or they are even happy about it.

In order to wreak violence on others, whether the violence is economic, social, psychological or physical, it is first necessary to perceive the intended victim as less than a person. To acknowledge our common humanity makes it far more difficult for this evil to be performed.

Thus, anyone who opposes government policies becomes a traitor. Innocent people in other countries and now here in the United States are suddenly "enemy combatants." People of lower socioeconomic status have become "white trash," "trailer trash," or worse. Anyone who is not in the corporate world or country-club set doesn't count as a "real" person.

Homeless people are perceived by mainstream society as being something less than a person, to be avoided, or to be rounded up and driven out of sight.

Ruthless people have taken control of society. Describing them as callous would be an understatement. Their philosophy is, "I've got mine, and if you want any, good luck getting it yourself."

Their greed and lust for the feeling of power are unchecked by any consideration for others, and they are having a grand old time wrecking everything. It's "everybody out for themselves" and they are having a "free for all" of grabbing all of the wealth and resources.

The gross inequality of our society, the way human rights are trampled underfoot, and the hoarding of vast amounts of wealth, all demonstrate the short-sighted, small-minded heartlessness of the economic elites. And this growing disparity and economic inequality in our society is unsustainable in the long run.

Reasoning with perpetrators like these people is about as useless as reasoning with a broken microwave oven. The poor and the middle class all have to get angry, organize, and come up with some kind of massive boycott of the rich. We can't expect those in power to voluntarily become nice guys.

It can be humiliating to beg for help. This is especially so if you are trying to get assistance from a mean and ungenerous person. If you ask for help, you risk discovering whether someone is willing to treat others well, when they believe they could get away with stomping on you.

I can't believe that there are people who will toy with someone for amusement rather than assisting someone in need or in trouble. The business world seems to encourage the attitude that help will never be given unless there is an incentive. This attitude is contagious and is one of the main reasons why the United States has so many self-induced problems.

People in big business are taught that you are some type of a sissy if you have the motive of helping people who are less fortunate. An idealistic person in politics is often subject to ostracism by peers. Human nature is such that if you show weakness, it encourages random abuse.

People often go into politics in the quest for status, power, and prestige for themselves — and without being motivated by a regard for human life. People should go into politics because they would like to help others, but this seems a rare motive among politicians.

People may believe I have been stating the obvious and may ask the question, "Where have you been?" However, at the age of nearly fifty, I am finally acknowledging that people are ruthless.

A lot of homeless people these days have resorted to begging by the side of the road. I have a problem with helping them because I am trying to stay out of car accidents and out of trouble with patrolling police. When they have asked while I am "on foot," I usually just give them some coins from my pocket and maybe a word of encouragement.

I get offended when a wealthy person accuses someone else of having "a sense of entitlement." Certainly, that person's fortune came about because they weren't afraid to take money from people.

When human beings are hiding behind a corporate shield, their legal liabilities in cases of improper conduct are less, and it is as if they are wearing some kind of warrior mask behind which they are anonymous. When they do something that hurts people, the corporation is in trouble. As individuals, they may escape unscathed, possibly with a generous severance package. We saw that happen when the government bailed out the banking system, and when President Obama gave massive amounts of public funds to giant automakers to prevent their demise. As individuals struggling to survive, if we are not a multibillion-dollar business we are out of luck.

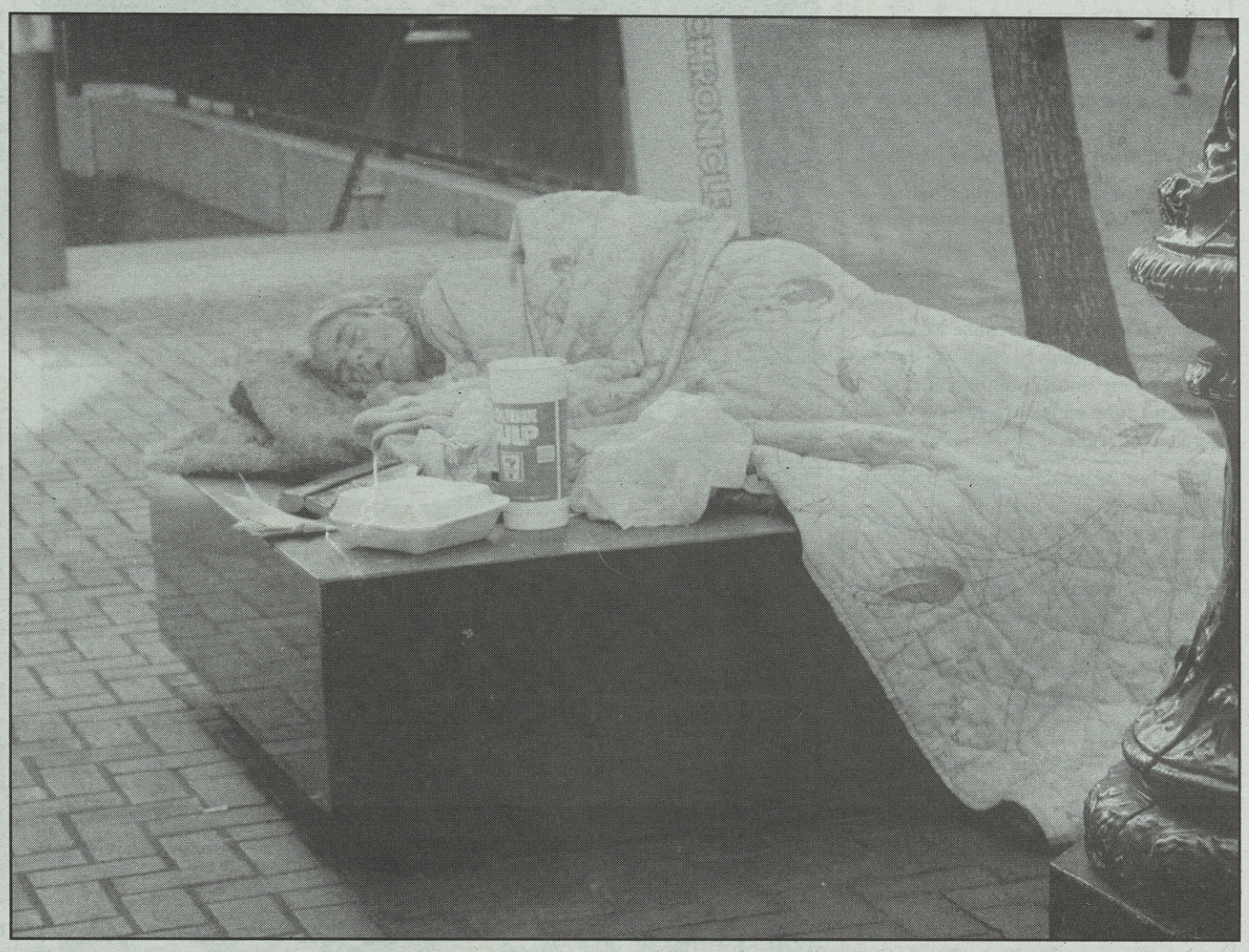
It's nice that successful people endowed with unimaginable amounts of wealth are having a good time in their mutual admiration. An example of this can be seen if you keep up with the Kardashians. This is a family which is famous for its fame, and which hasn't apparently done anything of particular merit.

I was just at a convenience store buying soda and a burrito, and the gentleman before me was delusional and believed his one "power ball" pick would make him a fortune. This is how desperate people become more desperate.

From where I stand, the people on television with billions of dollars may as well be from another universe. I can't relate.

The State of Homelessness in San Francisco

"The largest developers of low-income housing are the California Department of Corrections and the U.S. Department of Justice."
— Joe Wilson, Hospitality House



The true state of homelessness in San Francisco. A woman sleeps, alone and vulnerable, on Market Street. Lydia Gans photo

by TJ Johnston

New fronts in the battle on homelessness in San Francisco have opened up recently, including struggles for the rights of tenants, mental health clients and low-income residents of the Mission District.

These are just a few of the immediate skirmishes advocates face, according to a panel addressing the state of homelessness in the city. On May 23, the Coalition on Homelessness hosted a town hall meeting at the dining hall of St. Anthony Foundation, where hundreds of low-income and homeless people receive food, health care and other services.

Jennifer Friedenbach, director of the Coalition on Homelessness, said that as the city marks the tenth anniversary of its 10-year plan to abolish homelessness, 6,000-plus people still seek roofs over their heads, and while the media make a hue and cry over how much taxpayers' money is spent on homeless people, services only account for 2 percent of San Francisco's $8 billion budget.

"Historically, homeless people have been used as political scapegoats," she said. "Our job is to make it no longer acceptable to scapegoat on the basis of housing status."

Joe Wilson, program manager of Hospitality House's community building program, pointed out that public officials have chosen to disinvest in affordable housing for low-income people in favor of criminalizing them. "The largest developers of low-income housing are the California Department of Corrections and the U.S. Department of Justice," he said.

The panelists also said they are afraid that a law-enforcement approach to homelessness could also put those with mental health problems at risk.

Recently, implementing state legislation called Laura's Law was proposed as a ballot measure by Supervisor Mark Farrell. If five of the other 10 supervisors in San Francisco co-sponsor the ordinance, Farrell would remove it from the ballot and pass it legislatively.

The law, which passed in 2002 but was enacted fully only in Nevada County, would compel mentally ill people into involuntary commitment. It would allow family members, neighbors or roommates — as well as police or mental health professionals — to force people into programs.

While Laura's Law is endorsed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, state mental health and disability rights groups oppose the measure on the grounds that a person's power to make his own decisions would be removed.

Michael Gouse, deputy director of the Mental Health Association-San Francisco, said removing a client's agency undermines treatment. "Compliance is not the same as dignity or self-determination," Gouse said.

C.W. Johnson, a former mental health client who is also active with the association, said the law would have a disproportionate effect on homeless people.

According to a report from the state's mental health department, Laura's Law hasn't been uniformly effective in providing treatment. However, the California legislature extended the law's sunset date to 2017.

A confluence of escalating poverty and increasing rents are driving more people out of their homes and onto the streets, said Sara Shortt, director of the tenants' advocacy organization Housing Rights Committee. Displacement in San Francisco is often presaged by evictions, she added, and the most vulnerable population make under $15,000 per year.

She also pointed out that real estate speculation is fueling the latest wave of evictions, adding that the overheated market is more dire than in the dot-com bubble days of the 1990s.

"People could maybe double or triple up or maybe go to another neighborhood," Shortt said. "Those resourceful measures are no longer the options they once were. When you lose your home, it's a one-way ticket to homelessness."

Shortt cited the state Ellis Act, a tool landlords use that allows no-cause evictions of tenants under the pretense of leaving the rental business. Tenants Together and the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project reported that 10,000 San Francisco residents were displaced under the act since 1997, and almost one-third of the units were by landlords who repeatedly "Ellised" tenants out.

But measures are under way that could stanch the flow of evictions. They include a San Francisco ballot proposal to levy heavier taxes on properties that are flipped soon after they are bought.

In addition, on May 29, the state senate passed SB 1439, a bill by Sen. Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, to delay landlords from invoking the Ellis Act to evict tenants for at least five years after buying rental properties.

Despite the wave of evictions, Shortt said she is buoyed by a resurgence in tenant activism. "The silver lining is we have more power, organization, strength and energy among tenants than we had in a long time," she said.

People power could also play a factor in keeping Mission District residents in the neighborhood. Laura Guzman, director of the Mission Neighborhood Resource Center, said displacement has been developing over a long period of time. "Homelessness is not just now," she said. Her drop-in center is part of a coalition opposing the "Clean Up the Plaza" drive.

This clean-up campaign is fronted by political consultant Jack Davis, who is often aligned with real estate developers. The plaza at 16th and Mission streets is also the site for Maximus Real Estate Partners' proposed 300-unit mixed-use development that would displace neighborhood merchants.

Guzman said this is gentrification, and people who hang out at the plaza — including SRO tenants and homeless people who use her nearby drop-in center — are targets of a constant police presence.

Her assertion is supported by a sample from a recent Coalition on Homelessness survey. More than 100 people, mostly people of color, said they experienced harassment from the general public and scrutiny by law enforcement.

Street Spirit

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Little Child in Your Land

by Mary Rudge

Little child in your land
bombs bursting in air.
We watch TVs, check our remote,
to see your crumbling skyline, be sure
that our flag is still there
in your streets, around your home.

In your streets, around your home,
bombs burst in air, we put them there.
We have so many bombs to spare,
and crave your oil, a major share.
Say, are you safe within our care? —
we bomb your land because we can,
kill your neighbors to show we dare,
destroy your home, pollute your air,
though vague on how to grieve
for you, or leave.

Who's bad or good our power declares.
Vengeance is ours to decide
Let's have no hidden weapons now,
we get ours out onto your land.
From our pockets to your skies.
In your streets your body lies.
Over carnage our flag flies,
we watch TV to see it's there,
bombs bursting in air.

Little child, in our land,
on the sidewalks homeless lie
homeless hungry children cry,
schools are crumbling, and the poor
cannot afford health care and die.
Money sends bomb-burst in air,
who has cared for your welfare
little child in our land? We see where
over horror our flag flies.

So many years, so many wars,
so many little children die.
How can peace come to all lands
if we sing bombs burst in air
though our flag is there.
When our flag is there.
If flags fly then children die.

"In your streets, around your home, bombs burst in air, we put them there."

A Classic For All Ages

by Mary Rudge

Seven-year-old Diana and I
cry over Gogol's *The Overcoat*
on channel 9 now
cold Russia old poor man
even without subtitles
his face we both know.
It was cold in our house last winter
we had coats from the thrift shop
at night we slept in one bed
we piled on all the coats.
The cold old man is going to die
we saw that face once in our mirror,
and cry.

Letter to the Not Homeless

by Mary Rudge

A letter from the outer rim of rage
to the core of the inner being
of everyone
knowing the people
who live on the street out of mind
without home without healing
that we've learned to walk by
without seeing
that we don't care who is feeding
that no one is feeding, a letter to all
with home and mailbox.
A letter to all who have learned not to care
not to share anymore, there have been
so many so poor so long they are not in our
line of vision, though they stand before us
beseeching, saying God Bless You
for nothing. A letter is coming, has come
from fury, from anger, from despair.
And it says (what it said ten years ago,
and last year, and this morning): We
don't know where to go, what to do. Help!

TO THE MISSING

by Mary Rudge

I desperately look for your face
among the homeless and hungry.
I cannot find you.
I will feed this one,
I will take this one home,
in your name.

When I said I was searching for you
they asked: which ward do you
want to see?
What Multiple Sclerosis looks like?
What it looks like to be dying?
Have you seen AIDS? Schizophrenia?
Hunger?

One
turns like a flower toward the sun
toward love
like you, delicate around the mouth
with violet shadows,
everywhere I look.

Do people slip through the slats in
picket fences, the slats in hospital
beds? Become lost in trees?
Has anyone fallen past the Pacific Rim?

Is any poem I hold
strong enough for a lifeline?

Anyone You've Lost

by Mary Rudge

There are shanties down by the railroad track
and some are tarpaper, some are tin,
some are board with the walls so thin
newspapers cover the inside walls
to keep out the wind.

And the homeless build in the park,
some with cardboard and some with tarp
tents or lean-tos of plastic scrap.
There are people blanket-wrapped,
by day it's a coat by night it's a bed —
move on from this doorway the policeman said.

And a family can live in a rundown truck
that doesn't move much, just enough
to keep on the move
every seventy-two hours, it's the city law,
are they clean, do they cook, how do they eat?

Living on the street,
under the bushes close up to the church
outside where the ground is protected by frost
they shelter themselves, the ones who've lost.
The ones we've lost, but still our own,
our children, our sisters, our brother's child.
Is anyone you've loved and known
without a home? Is anyone without a home
someone you can love?

Journey from Christmas to Easter

by Mary Rudge

SEQUENCE 1

They followed the star
and found him
sleeping in a doorway.

They followed the star
and found him
lying in the alley, on cardboard.

They followed a star
and found him
sitting against a building,
wrapped in a blanket.

They followed a star and found
him at a bus stop, at 3 a.m.,
hypothermia setting in.

*****

SEQUENCE 2

He looked up and saw the stars
through the drizzle of rain.
They were his roof.

He looked up and saw the stars
on the badges.
The police said, "go!"

The men with stars
on their police badges —
they would give him room:
jail cell, hospital, morgue

*****

SEQUENCE 3

He had wandered far
Sonora to California,
illegal, ill, still no home, no room,
dispossessed, disappeared.

He had wandered far
wondering where to sleep
that night the shelter was full
no room for him again.

He did not hear
the angels sing

just police sirens.

He was 18, 29, 52, 70,
he had wandered far.

*****

SEQUENCE 4

He was not a wise man
He could not follow the directions.
He was fired, laid off, not hired.

He was bipolar, alcoholic,
schizophrenic, an addict,
too low I.Q.

He did not understand
there would never
be room for him.

*****

SEQUENCE 5

He had wandered far
1968 1986 2008
still no home, no shelter.

He had no job skills
no social connections
no family No buddy
no place in the end.

He had wandered far,
Louisiana, Texas, California,
He could not pay —
no room no room no room.

A black plastic sack
a cardboard box
his hands on a cart
of crushed cans, he said,
this is home.

*****

SEQUENCE 6

She laid him
wrapped in a blanket
in a garbage bin
an infant, new-born

They found the infant
wrapped in a blanket
in the garbage bin —
the police with the stars
on their badges.

One Nation Under God

by Mary Rudge

With broken eyeglasses and broken veins
she stands on the corner showing things
have a kaleidoscopic other view.

When she asks spare change
but you pass by
her only response is "God bless you"
and a broken-toothed smile.
She shows you how hearts really break,
can you feel your own?
She lets you see a whole country with
a government full of broken promises.

Midnight Haiku

by Mary Rudge

A bus goes by; another, another.
She is not waiting for a bus.
She is already at home. Here. On this bench.

Any Sunday Haiku

by Mary Rudge

Sunday morning. She does not go to church.
No place to park her shopping cart
full of crushed cans.

Santa Cruz Activists Call for One-Year Moratorium on Laws that Criminalize Camping and Sleeping

Outlawing the right to sleep is a failed policy. We must not vilify a large segment of our community based solely on their housing status.

A woman named Butterfly packs her belongings in San Lorenzo Park in Santa Cruz. This photo was taken by Natalia Banaszczyk as part of a Santa Cruz project called "Not the Other: Oral Histories of People Experiencing Homelessness."

by Steve Pleich

Although the Homeless Persons Legal Assistance Project is a relatively new ally with the community of people experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz, many local advocacy organizations have been active for decades in the fight for homeless rights.

Together with groups such as Homeless United for Friendship and Freedom (HUFF) and Housing Now, we are not only working to support the unsheltered, we are developing new strategies to challenge the institutional prejudices that have not only marginalized but have also criminalized homeless people in Santa Cruz.

In an effort to focus the community discussion on the underlying causes of this prejudice and marginalization, we have created an online Petition for One Year Moratorium of Camping Ban Ordinances and Laws to raise the level of public debate about how we treat our homeless residents and what we can do to better understand them.

Since their enactment in the city and county of Santa Cruz, the laws and ordinances that prohibit "camping" and/or "sleeping" have been wholly ineffective in addressing the environmental and social impact of survival sleeping by local homeless people. They have also been ineffective as a policy aimed at reducing the size and presence of the homeless population.

Recent statistics clearly show that the number of people experiencing homelessness in both the city and county has increased despite the continuing enforcement of these laws and ordinances.

Additionally, the Santa Cruz Police Department, Parks and Recreation Department, the City Attorney, the Sheriff's Office, as well as the entire Santa Cruz County Superior Court judicial system continue to expend resources and funds in the enforcement and administration of these laws — resources that could be more productively applied to addressing the very real challenge of ending or significantly reducing homelessness in our community.

It is clear from these facts that criminalizing homelessness, and particularly, outlawing the essential right to sleep, is a failed policy and one that must be revisited if we are to move forward and create truly positive outcomes for our unsheltered residents.

That is why homeless advocacy organizations are now calling upon the Santa Cruz City Council and the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors to consider for approval a One Year Moratorium on the enforcement within their respective jurisdictions of all camping and sleeping ban laws and ordinances between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. Also, we are calling upon our local governing bodies to instruct their respective staffs, in cooperation with their finance departments, to conduct a fiscal review of the cost savings of the proposed moratorium.

By any reasonable estimation, the City and County of Santa Cruz are spending many tens of thousands of dollars annually in the enforcement and administration of camping/sleeping ban ordinances and laws. The proposed moratorium would not only provide an accurate accounting of those costs and savings; it would also identify those agencies and organizations where policy change with regard to the homeless community could have the maximum positive effect.

Simply by just "pressing pause" on this massive investment in anti-homeless enforcement, the structural design flaws in the existing system could be examined. This alone, in our view, would justify the abatement of enforcement for this relatively brief period.

During this period, we are also calling upon our elected officials to review the feasibility of establishing "safe space" overnight parking areas within the city and county, as well as the development of a plan to increase the availability of and access to public restroom facilities at night.

Local groups, and particularly the faith community, have called for the creation of designated areas within the city and county where vehicularly housed residents could safely park from dusk until dawn and find the peaceful night's sleep that they cannot get by parking on public streets in violation of local ordinances.

It is estimated that between 200 and 300 motor homes, recreational vehicles, vans and automobiles are home every night to those who cannot otherwise find shelter. This may represent as many as 500 of our nearly 3,500 homeless residents in Santa Cruz County. The possibility of providing a "safe space" for so significant a percentage of the unsheltered more than justifies serious consideration of this proposal.

While we believe that these are practical suggestions that speak to a culture that has systematically worked to vilify and exclude a large segment of our community based solely upon their housing status, change is needed on a policy level as well. We are calling upon our local elected bodies to designate ending homelessness as a legislative priority.

Although reasonable minds may differ about the wisdom of our current policies, it cannot be disputed that the fair treatment of people experiencing homelessness has historically been one of our lowest legislative priorities. We believe that even the symbolic gesture that this may well be can profoundly impact the public perception of this issue.

The more substantive approach would include the creation of a commission or committee singularly tasked with addressing homelessness in Santa Cruz, and given full advisory authority to do all acts in furtherance of that task.

This is our proposal. Some community members have expressed concerns about the practical effects of the proposed moratorium. Some say that even a temporary suspension of existing law and ordinance would have a disruptive effect on our community, and this is a possibility.

But we are in a state of social emergency that challenges all of us to take a leap of faith. In creating our Petition and proposal, we are declaring that small steps are no longer enough.

The full text of the One Year Moratorium on Enforcement of Camping Ban Laws and Ordinances can be viewed at: *http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/one-year-moratorium-on*

Steve Pleich is director of the Santa Cruz Homeless Persons Legal Assistance Project.

To The Homeless Street Person

by Mary Rudge

How do I love thee not,
let me count the ways:
for the guilt I feel
when you sleep on sidewalks;
for impotence I show
when you cannot be helped;
for anger that destroys me
at what is not tried;
for sleeplessness in despair that
solutions have been failures;
for tears when I see your
picture in the newspapers;
for tears when no picture,
no report is made
as if no one cares;
for obituaries that say
Randy, or David, or Linda —
no info, no other name;
for my being part of society
that cannot cope with poverty;
because religion and government
are at odds on the homeless —
when the Bible warns there will
always be poor, for one reason after
another, in every country,
in every time,
so have a plan to care for them.
For my own suffering,
more than yours
I know I love you not.

Your Mirror Image, God

by Mary Rudge

The violence of ignoring you
shatters your soul
I see the pieces on the sidewalk

On Defining Democracy

by Mary Rudge

A democracy
was once defined
sarcastically –
as a land where
rich and poor can
sleep under bridges
equally.

Now no one is free
to sleep
on sidewalks,
in doorways,
in parks, in cars,
among bushes,
under bridges.
What philosophy
bridged this land
from Then until Now?

Fines, prisons, jail
for those who fail
to keep this new law.
But to be
equally
inhumane
to both sane
and insane
and to all homeless,
is still democracy.

"Urban Camping." **Many homeless people are resourceful and skillful. They find ingenious ways to live outdoors by creating a sense of home.** Pedro Del Norte photo

Susan Werner pins a boutonniere on Keith Arivnwine to honor his work as a photographer in documenting the conditions facing homeless people. Lydia Gans photo

"I Feel for Him, Whoever He Is." **Charles Ford said, "Homeless people feel desperate and totally hopeless. Life is rough when you're homeless."** Charles Ford photo

On Our Way Home: Documenting Life on the Streets

It is shocking to realize how many lives are ruined and destroyed by poverty in the affluent Bay Area.

from page 1

to come out spontaneously from their planning discussions. "This is what it's like on the way home. It was apparent to us all of a sudden. It is home not only in the physical sense, but in the sense of belonging in this world as somebody."

At the exhibit, photographer Keith Arivnwine pointed to one of his pictures titled, "It becomes acceptable," which shows a pile of detritus on a city street. "It becomes acceptable," he said. "You no longer notice the mess in the streets around you. You see it every day. I now have a different life and it's not acceptable. There's something wrong with this picture."

After the classes and training at St. Mary's, he wrote, "I feel good about myself and fit into the lifestyle of being housed and mentally stable." And now he can give hope and encouragement to other people who are homeless.

Perkins Edwards likes to quote his grandfather who was a pastor. "My granddaddy used to tell us, 'Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change.'"

Photos of free meals provided by churches and community organizations appeared in several of the displays, but one carried a special message. Vernon Andrews titled his picture, "Restoring self-esteem." This particular meal was a lunch celebrating Father's Day.

"I Am My Brother's Keeper." **Photographer Perkin Edwards said, "All human beings are family and friends we haven't met yet."**

"It was a really touching thing," Andrews said. Acknowledging that even a poor man can be a father "made people feel a little better about themselves. It made people inspired about restoring their self-esteem and restoring themselves to being fathers."

Pedro Del Norte said, "I never felt homeless, I never looked homeless." But he talked about couch surfing. "I stayed at my sister's, and at the Richmond Mission for a night. It's like urban camping but it's not by choice."

Describing his experience in St. Mary's Center, Del Norte said, "I am in the process of creating a fulfilling life and I like to contribute to the common good. I hope that we can all come together to make the world a healthier place."

The idea of "giving back" by reaching out to help others, and by becoming an advocate for the poor and homeless, was echoed by the man who goes by the name "Guitar" Whitfield. (Yes, he is an accomplished jazz musician and guitarist.)

Guitar "had been living a fast life," he admits, when he suddenly became homeless. "It brought me down to earth," he said. When he was admitted into St. Mary's Winter Shelter, he had the opportunity to get his life in order.

Along with the basics, such as food

See **On Our Way Home** *page 7*

"All Wrapped Up." **A homeless woman in Oakland is all wrapped up as a shield from the cold, and in self-protective isolation from an intolerant society.** Charles Ford photo

On Our Way Home

from page 6

and shelter, he was offered counseling, social skills and career development. And they found him permanent, affordable housing. Since his own experience at St. Mary's had been so helpful, he said, "I felt like everyone should have an opportunity like I had at St. Mary's. So they suggested I go out and tell people my story."

Now, Guitar tells his story to people on the street and to people in power in Oakland and Sacramento. And he plays his guitar at community events that support the cause. He is a Hope and Justice Senior Advocate at St. Mary's, traveling with his fellow seniors to public hearings and community events, and speaking out on the social issues that affect the lives of homeless people in Alameda County.

As this project developed, it became an important way for homeless men to make their voices heard, and they learned to use images to open the eyes of the public to the terrible increase in poverty and homelessness among seniors in Oakland. The physical hardships and dangers of life on the streets are shortening the life spans of seniors in tragic ways.

The photographs taken by the senior men are also meant to reflect the hope and commitment of homeless people who are trying to improve their lives. Yet, the overwhelming message of this exhibit is that far more help is needed than political officials are willing to provide. It is shocking to realize how many lives are ruined and destroyed by poverty in the affluent Bay Area in the 21st century.

Reading the men's statements and listening to their stories, it is truly impressive to see how they have succeeded in turning their lives around. Men who were wasting their lives, and were rejected by society, not only improved their own lives, but began to reach out and help others.

With community and government support, more programs like St. Mary's could have a big social impact. But housing is the essential element and that seems only to become increasingly inaccessible and unaffordable.

According to Werner, all but two of the seniors participating in the project have been housed, but this is highly unusual. "It often takes years to get into affordable, desirable housing," she said.

We must make it possible for all people to find their way home.

"Anything Helps." **A man's sign seen through a windshield: "Homeless and hungry. Can you help us please?"** Darrell Black photo

"A Way to Survive." **"When I was homeless I used a shopping basket to carry my belongings and to recycle," said Keith Arivnwine.** Photo by Keith Arivnwine

Homeless Photographers Describe Life on the Street

See the stories of the homeless and formerly homeless seniors who documented the conditions of life on the streets of Oakland. Read their stories on pages 8-9.

I Want Every Person to Have A Decent Life

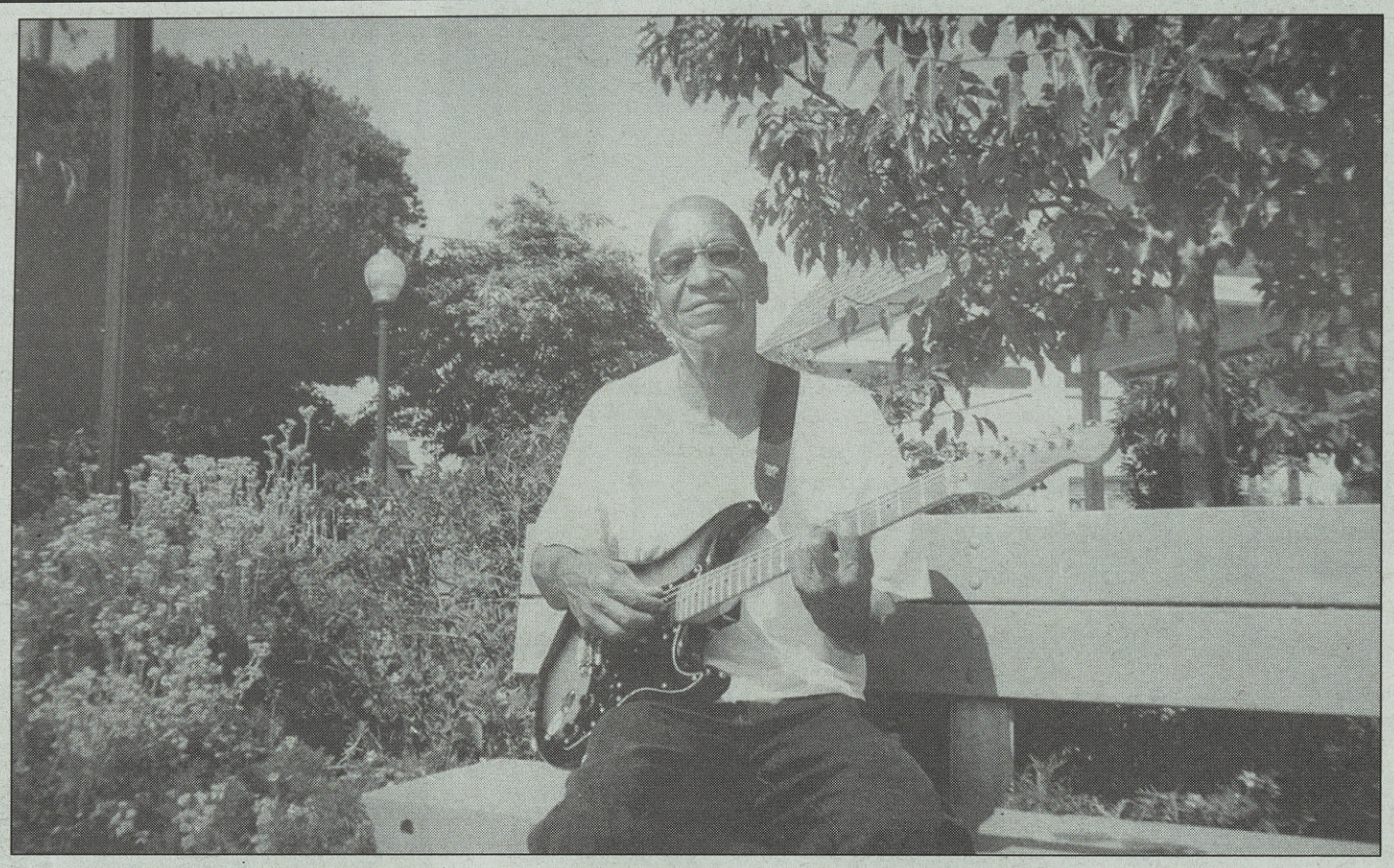
by Guitar Whitfield

I want everyone to have a decent life in America. People are running around hungry and homeless. People need to help one another. I see some people on the streets getting help. I got help and want others to get help too.

I came to the Bay Area from Las Vegas at a time I wanted to make a change in my life. I wanted to be near my children and grandchildren. I didn't know what I was going to do or where I'd live. Then my brother and sister-in-law introduced me to St. Mary's Center.

When I entered St. Mary's, I was offered shelter, food, counseling, social skill development, and access to transportation, medical care, career development, and affordable transitional and permanent housing. I met regularly with a case manager. Staff at St. Mary's work straight from the heart. I saw that if I gave the program a chance, something would work for me. I felt hope.

I started to learn about homelessness. I met and felt for people who are homeless and became connected to people. I had to humble myself and see I had been living a fast life. I needed to stop a lush life of splurging. To stay in the shelter, I had to start saving one-half of my monthly income. I had never done that before. I saved money and my savings added up!



"Peace on Earth." **Guitar Whitfield said, "If I can advocate and play music for the benefit of other people, I will."**

I applied for housing and needed someone to advocate for me. Sister Mary Nolan wrote a letter of recommendation to accompany my applications. Her statement helped to show my accountability and participation in St. Mary's programs.

While I was at St. Mary's, I stayed in touch with my craft: playing the guitar. Within the gated and manicured community of St. Mary's, I continued to play music. What more could I ask for?

I moved into subsidized housing at Merritt Crossing Senior Apartments in Oakland. I was grateful for the advocacy that I had received. Now I volunteer with St. Mary's, East Bay Housing Organizations, Satellite Housing, and Affordable Housing Associates to help build opportunities for others.

As a Hope and Justice Senior Advocate, I speak out primarily for affordable housing. I also play music for these organizations at events throughout the community.

I'm about giving. If I can advocate and play music for the benefit of other people, I will.

They Care for the Lives of the People They Serve

by Vernon Andrews

I have been homeless a few times over the past twenty years. I know people who use the drop-in centers, soup kitchens, and agencies for poor people. It's important to have places to eat.

Churches have been helping poor people for a long time. They provide nutritional food which enables people to live and have hope.

I go for a meal on Wednesdays at a church on Idaho Street in Berkeley. The people who run the meals at this church go beyond serving food; they care for the lives of the people they serve. On Father's Day, the church added festivities to recognize fathers. The celebration felt spirit-lifting.

On Thursdays, I eat at another church in Berkeley on Fairview Street. At least 100 people come during the hour that food is served. The staff has a passion for people. They serve meals on a regular basis without pay. They wouldn't show up unless they cared. Inside the church, people from all races come to eat. A balanced meal is served and fresh vegetables are available to take home.

Some people are mentally challenged and have dual disorders. Some would perish if they didn't have people helping them. They are people with needs. People who need social services are worthy of being recognized.

Some homeless people recycle. They put a lot of effort into collecting bottles and cans. They walk and travel a lot of ground. They are not lazy. I admire them.

The people I've known when homeless honor our relationship as friends. They have good spirits and are cordial. They always have time to say "Hi" and to ask, "What's going on with you?"

They want to know how you are. It is meaningful that we communicate. One man I've known for over 20 years always speaks to me. His caring spirit uplifts me.

People I've known show me kindness. This contrasts with when I've been treated heartlessly and judged as less than. I care about these people. Some people are able to live independently. Some may speak slower, but know what they want to say. They are more honest than a whole lot of people I know. They are genuine, good people, caring and loving.

I Feel Connected to Their Suffering

by Charles Ford

Sad. So Sad. I could be one of the people in these photos. Homeless people are part of the population, they are among us. Life is pretty rough when you're homeless. People often feel desperate, totally hopeless.

Homeless people become more visible when we see them sleeping on the streets, and we walk by them, seeming indifferent. That's heartbreaking. Of all the places I've slept when homeless, a church felt the safest to me.

Homeless people have the burden of carrying their belongings wherever they go; they do not want to lose their things. Carts with their life possessions can be seen throughout town. Homeless people often walk all day long to eat, be safe, and sleep. It is hard work and necessary. When I was homeless I was on my feet during the day collecting cans. The payoff was $25 a day for a few big bags of cans.

To be homeless is exhausting. People need spots where they can rest and rejuvenate. People need jobs. Homeless and poor people also need free food. This is basic to living in poverty.

When I was homeless I often felt very bad and without hope. I did not see a way out; I needed some help. I turned to God for guidance and believed there'd be something better for me. I asked the Almighty "Where shall I go?"

I went to the men's shelter in Berkeley where many homeless people stay. I felt lost in the crowd and left. Then after a hospitalization, I was discharged to St. Mary' Center's shelter.

I was skeptical about another shelter stay and downhearted when I arrived. I participated in the shelter program at St. Mary's. The atmosphere and people around me felt better than other shelters. I began to feel better about myself and more positive about building a more fulfilling, productive life.

I feel for people who are going through homelessness. Many suffer from mental poverty and are not capable of accessing services and putting their lives together. People are constrained by poverty in many ways. There is a lot to understand about people who are homeless, like what makes it difficult for people to accept services and what makes it possible.

I see people who are not well off and I feel connected to their suffering. Homeless people need connection to others who care and offer more possibilities for their lives. I truly hope to be of help.

I'm Concerned for the Human Family

by Perkins Edwards

My granddaddy always said, "All human beings are family and friends we haven't met yet." And, "Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change."

I'm 67 years old. I've come to know that the way I approach life makes a difference. I see the crisis in our government, the reductions in subsidized housing, the dismantling of schools and homelessness.

I see a young man in a sleeping bag on the street, hiding his face. I know this person and his family. People are concerned about and care for him. Some people on the streets have mental health problems. I am concerned for the Human Family!

When I became homeless, I looked for a working example of a solution. I found St. Mary's Center, a waystation for people who are homeless and in transition.

I came to St. Mary's Center like the energizer bunny ready to be recharged. The staff has a mission and offers love, understanding, and loyalty. I was raised in a village as a child and I found village people and friendship at St. Mary's. I needed to be with people who had experienced and understood homelessness.

On the street, I needed to be a macho man, a tough guy. At St. Mary's I did not want to hide. I could show my personal feelings. I walked around with my eyes full of tears. When I wept, people understood.

When I struggle with a self-defeating habit, I resent people telling me what to do. At St. Mary's we are in the same situation. When we sit around the tables for classes or dinners, we speak from the heart. The spirit connects us. When I hear and feel the truth and energy of our shared life, I know I have a chance to survive and overcome adversity.

When I see people who are homeless, I see a bit of myself. People need places to a take time out and remember one's real self. They need places where everyone is equal and recognized for their creativity and ability.

At St. Mary's, I went to the on-site inner courtyard for solitude, silence, and to heighten my awareness of God's presence and guidance. I learned to love being myself and to stay in touch with my Heart and Spirit. Now when I meet adversity, I dig a little deeper.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is a hero and role model for me. He told Black people to believe in equality for all people. I too am a troublemaker on a mission for equality. It ain't over yet!

Life Gets Better and Better Every Day

by Keith Arivnwine

The lifestyle of homelessness is a decision that I made. When I was homeless, I used a shopping basket to carry my belongings and to recycle. I met many homeless people at the recycling center. It was productive to collect cans.

Unfortunately, I saw many people using the money for wants, not basic needs. Also, I became accustomed to seeing stuff trashed and dumped on the street. Walking past disgusting things everyday became acceptable. I accepted the misery because I felt miserable.

When I was in jail, I felt a desire for change from within. Once I felt the touch, I started making changes in my life. I began to see my homeless lifestyle for what it was. I realized I needed help to be retrained.

I applied for General Assistance and used the funds to buy a cell phone and bus pass, which helped me to be successful in my new venture. Having good free meals and contact with people with positive attitudes in the community also helped.

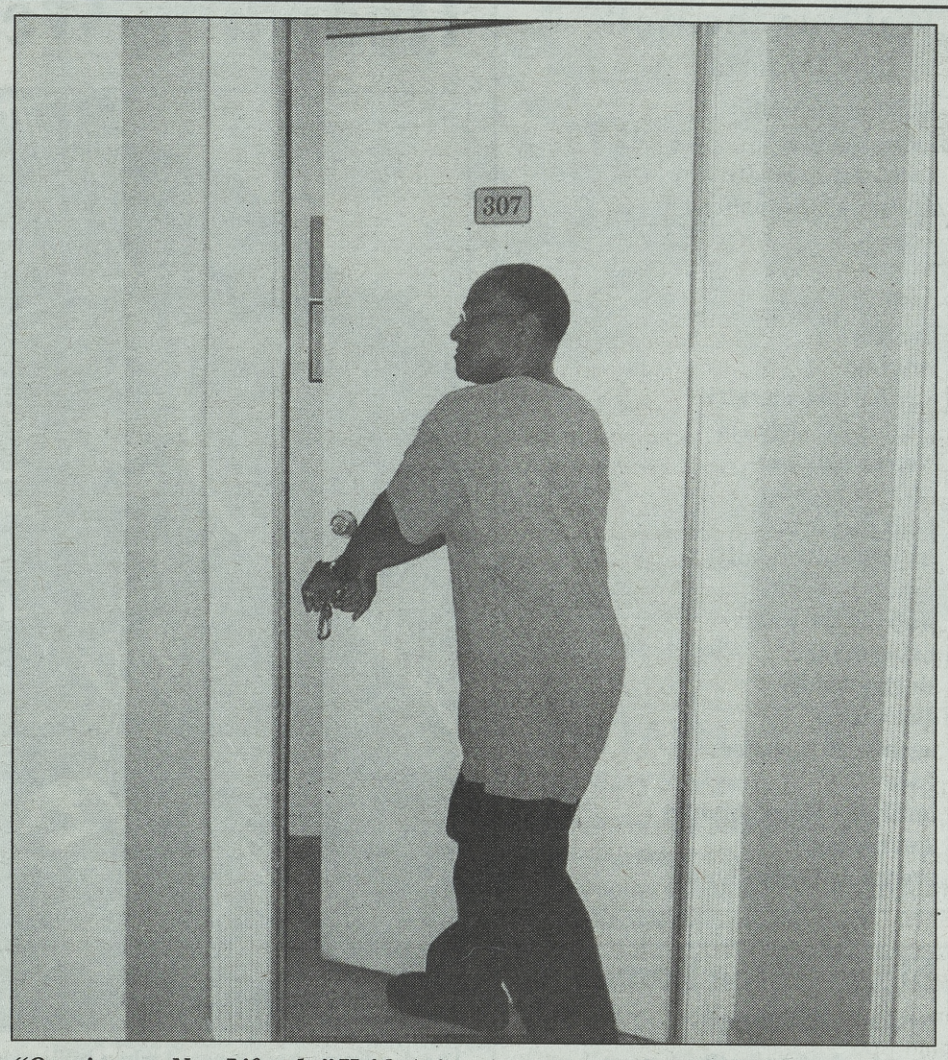
I learned about St. Mary's shelter when in jail and entered the shelter in December 2012. I attended the shelter's wellness classes and did things I didn't normally do. I took the classes seriously and looked at things for what they really are. The classes offered important training to maintain a proper lifestyle when housed. At St. Mary's I was around positive people who also wanted to do something different with their lives.

St. Mary's is across from a park where homeless people gather. When I'd see people in the park, I was reminded of my past, and felt strength to stay with my desire for change.

After engaging in St. Mary's programs for four months, I had a key in my hand for my own studio apartment. Every time I turn the key to open the door to my apartment I feel appreciation and accomplishment.

I'm now living where God wants me to be. I feel good about myself and fit into the lifestyle of being housed and mentally stable. I keep in mind that everything starts from within. I will have obstacles in my life. I now know that when an unexpected situation happens, I can deal with it.

Life is so good and gets better and better every day. People who are homeless now come to me and ask, "How did you do it? How can I do the same?"



"Opening to a New Lifestyle." **Keith Arivnwine opens the door of his new apartment.**

The Streets Became My Home But I Did Not Give Up

by Ron Clark

I walk along the street, see a person on a bench, many bags, blankets by his side. Cursing. I know what he's going through. Being homeless, you don't like the way people look at you, you don't feel worthy, you don't feel right.

I do not agree that homelessness is a choice. If I were given the option of jumping into a fire or sleeping on a comfortable couch, I'd take the couch. Not all people on the streets are able to make that choice.

I became homeless about 15 years ago. At that time, my mother developed Alzheimer's. Her illness affected the family and plans for me to inherit her home did not materialize.

I became depressed — that was not like me. I prayed, "How will I get myself out of this mess?" I didn't know where to turn. Circumstances of staying with other people were not what they initially seemed; they turned out to be full of conflict.

The streets became my home. I always kept neat and clean; I did not give up my humanity. I did not give up.

As a gypsy traveler, I rode buses, especially during the night. Bus drivers would ask me, "What are you going to do?" I'd reply, "I'm gonna catch another bus."

Sometimes I'd pass the wee hours of the night on a park bench. I'd wake up early morning and sit. The park bench was my couch, the green grass and trees were my living room. I'd take in the simple pleasures of life.

After a while, I felt too uncomfortable around the night crowd and rats roaming the streets of Oakland.

I then stayed in shelters. At the Richmond Rescue Mission, I'd sit huddled close to others listening to a sermon. I felt coerced. I could have left, though that's a hard decision to make, especially when it's raining outside.

I stayed at the men's shelter in Berkeley. It felt foreboding to walk through a narrow passageway to enter the shelter. Staying in this shelter was OK. I understood I had to do certain things to have a bed.

I feel for people on the streets. I've been seeing and speaking with some people for years. Some people talk crazy to defend and protect themselves. With some, the more I talk with them, the more they make sense, and we become friends.

When homeless, I understood I needed to do some things and give up some things to make a change. I also needed to be treated like a human being and offered a life preserver so I would not die on the streets.

I want to see more acceptance and less judgment of homeless people. People need places to go to get their life together. No one should be out there on the streets.

I Learned I'm a Warrior, a Survivor

by Darrell Black

I had been receiving a pension for three years when the union unexpectedly informed me that my retirement fund was expended. I had not been aware of a limit. Then, all of a sudden, my employer stopped paying me for my work. I was not able to afford my rent and was evicted.

Places I stayed were temporary. I felt depressed. I feared I'd have to sleep on the streets. A friend told me about the shelter at St. Mary's Center. When St. Mary's offered me a shelter bed, I felt relieved.

When I had no money, I was hungry. I found places where people receive food for free, such as the GRIP Souper Center in Richmond. GRIP (Greater Richmond Interfaith Project) offers Love, Help, Food and Work. With Love, a lot is possible. My appreciation increased for places that provide services to homeless people.

I felt for a woman living under the freeway. I could have been out there like her. She was happy to have her photo taken. She had adapted, made the best of her situation. The sign on her cart read, "Please do yourself a favor for tomorrow or any day; don't let the hype fool you. Stay Safe."

I spoke with several people on the streets for this project. People who are homeless can survive sleeping outside.

However, poverty and depression are stressful and stress can kill. Circumstances can draw people over the edge. Some people agreed to a photo. Many said no and raised their hands in front of their face.

After St. Mary's shelter, I went to Second Opportunity Christian Center's Transitional Safe House. It's a sober living house for people serious about their recovery and belief in God. I received support to become employed and now manage a restaurant and a construction business.

I've learned from my experience of being homeless that I'm a warrior, a survivor. When I was going through rough, raw stuff, people said things to me that felt hurtful. I learned that no matter what a person goes through, it's most important not to look down on anyone.

It matters to offer encouragement and hope, and to tell a person, "Don't give up. Life is not over. You can make life better." I learned not to wear my feelings on my sleeves and to continually focus on changing my life.

People who are homeless need help. Services in our community for shelter, meals, health care, education, and employment are essential. Programs motivate and assist people to make real changes in their lives. Funding for these programs needs to be continued.

I give thanks to God. God brought me through and helps all who trust and believe.

Make the World a Healthier Place

by Pedro Del Norte

When I became homeless, I didn't feel it or look like it, but I was. As I surrendered to being homeless, I needed to re-evaluate what my life had become. The old ways were no longer so important to me.

I began to accept new views of myself and life and to operate in unfamiliar territory. I live more in the present to find opportunities and my future.

For this photography project, I woke up at 5 a.m. to walk the streets. I saw people sleeping at bus stops, under freeways, at social services, all around St. Vinny's, behind the police station, underneath the BART overpass, and at the threshold of churches.

By 6 a.m., the people had left their spots to begin their daily routine. Homeless people live a semi-nomadic life, and go until they are beat.

Many people fall through the cracks and become homeless. Many have felt disempowered, isolated, and out-of-sync with other people and society.

And many homeless people are ingenious, intelligent, and resourceful. They establish comfortable ways to live outdoors. Some people find a dry spot, a quiet place, and create accommodations. They arrange their valuables, bedding, and stuff to make a niche with a certain amount of comfort and safety.

Having a spot gives a person a sense of "home." People become territorial and protective of their spot.

Mattresses are important creature comforts. A person can stretch out and feel rested on a mattress. Sleeping on a mattress is much better than sleeping in a car or on a bench.

Homeless people's lives have been derailed. A homeless person is in survival mode and focused on what's needed to make it through each day. When homeless, it is not easy to find gainful employment. Even with skills, it can be difficult to become re-established.

Homeless people need assistance to get back on track. People often need access to a wide range of support to make a life change. At St. Mary's Center I enjoyed connecting and engaging with other people. I felt a sense of belonging as we shared experiences and collaborated in overcoming adversity.

Now when I see someone who is homeless or emotionally challenged, I like to consider how to share a kind word and offer comfort.

I am in the process of creating a fulfilling life and I like to contribute to the common good. I hope that we all can come together to make the world a healthier place. I do see this evolving, little by little.

Walking the Walk

by Judy Joy Jones

walking the walk
living the talk
speaking up loudly
against all inequality
I see

until all people
are free
will I be
forever thru eternity
singing for rights of
women children
and the poor
until they are
treated with dignity

walking the walk
living the talk
singing boldly
and strong
against all injustices
I see
until all women children
and the poor
are treated with dignity

blood of the homeless

by Judy Joy Jones

the blood soaked pillow
of a homeless man
who used
concrete streets
for his bed
died in the night

I didn't know you
my precious friend
but I'll carry on
the flame
in honor of
your life

you did not
live in vain

may I carve the name
of this unknown poet
in the book of life

you will
be known
as my
eternal brother
forever more

spotters needed

by Judy Joy Jones

spotters needed
catch homeless
trying to pee
eat or sleep
on our fine streets

turn 'em into
the police

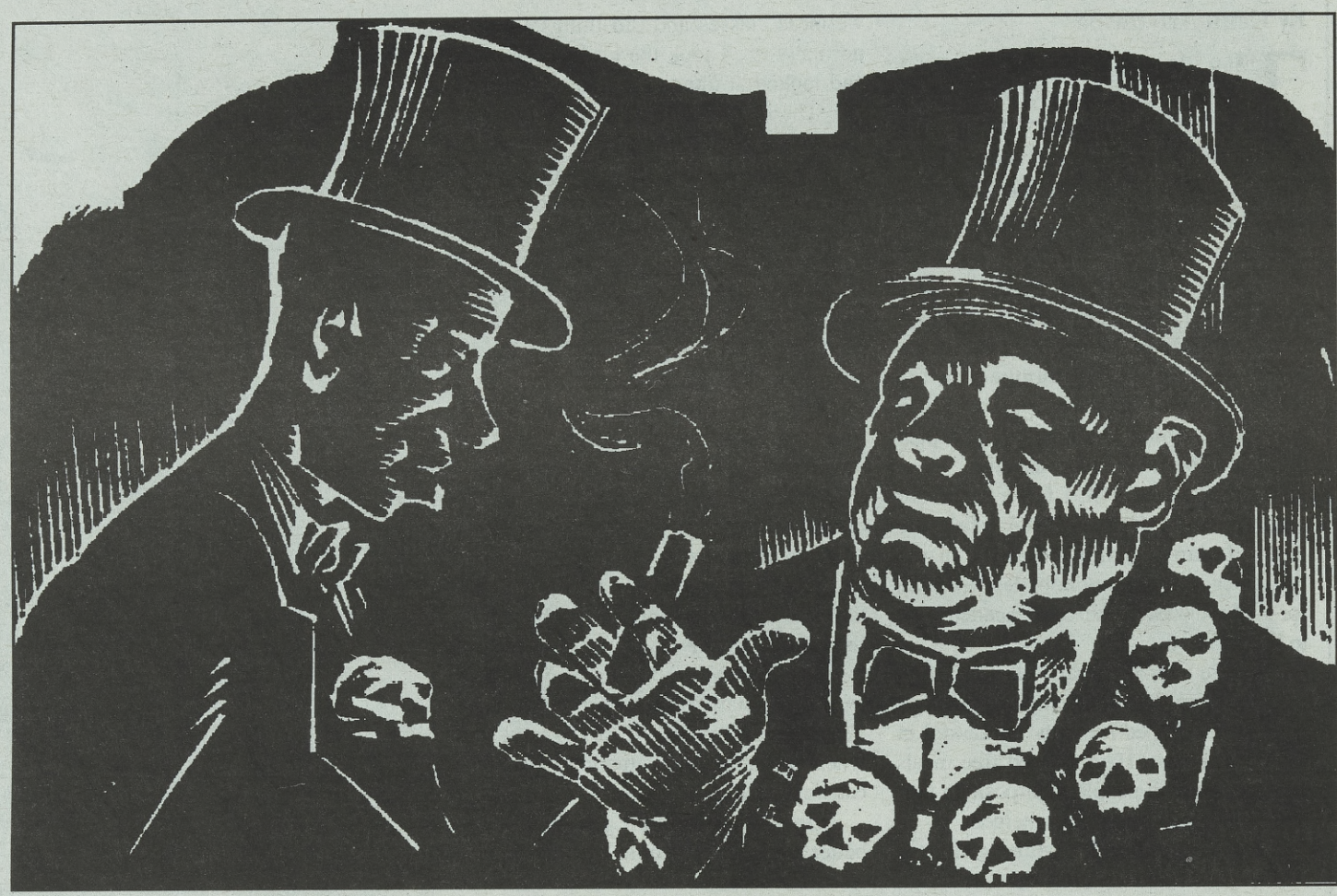
it's fun —
they sit
too long in a cafe
call 911
and watch 'em run

teaching youth
working in stores
how to treat
the most helpless ones
of our society

make 'em walk
until they die
so we can
be happy and free

get 'em
out of sight
and everything will be
all right

Hoarding Wealth Impoverishes Workers



The deadly poverty created when billionaires hoard wealth is symbolized by the skulls worn by tycoons. Art by Victor Arnautoff

by Jack Bragen

Prominent multibillionaires — those at the top of the economic heap — and multimillionaires — those who are "merely" comfortable — often need to invest in public relations so that the public doesn't despise them for hogging up all the money. Publicists are eager to point out all of the "good" activities and the generosity of these moguls. In fact, no individual should be allowed to hoard a billion dollars. It just isn't right.

In a society that had any sort of fairness, we might have a cap of maybe twenty million dollars as a maximum amount that one individual is allowed to have. This might sound like a communist ideal, but, in fact, it is only fair.

When someone is able to accumulate a personal fortune into the billions, it is ridiculous not to acknowledge they are capitalizing upon the work of thousands of subordinates, workers and supporters. You do not get that kind of money merely through your own work — it is not plausible.

Thus, for every multimillionaire or billionaire, there are hundreds of thousands who barely get by on low wages, all of whom are contributing to the increasing wealth of one person at the top of this pyramid.

It is easy for the wealthy to scoff and say, "Go out and make your own fortune. I did it, why can't you?" And this is yet another example of the sense of entitlement and the arrogance of those blessed with enormous levels of success.

But let me play devil's advocate for a few paragraphs.

Contrary to what one might believe, people with money have their own sets of hardships that they have exchanged for the ones that exist for the poor. People with money often need to defend it against lawsuits. If someone is injured on their property or in a car accident, it can entail millions in damages. Or, a lawsuit could be fabricated from insubstantial supposed wrongs.

They must deal with the IRS, which is apt to put them in prison if they slip up too much on their taxes. People with money must deal with relatives or acquaintances begging for some of it, and such a loan only creates resentment on both sides.

People with money must deal with neighbors with whom relations aren't always good. If they don't want neighbors, they might get a house in the middle of nowhere. In this case, they are ripe for a home invasion robbery. People with money must constantly deal with turning on and off their burglar alarms and with not creating a false alarm.

People with money must be educated in how to handle their money. If they leave the handling of it to a specialist, their money managers and accountants could rip them off.

Money entails a tremendous amount of responsibility at a level which many poor people could not handle. Nicholas Cage, a famous movie star, spent approximately a hundred million dollars in a short period of time and became poor. At the time of his death, Michael Jackson owed more money than he was worth.

Big money entails a lot of temptation.

One very famous rap celebrity had diamonds implanted on his front teeth. Shoe collections of the rich and famous could take up a whole room, with each pair being worth tens of thousands. Extreme wealth leads to extreme waste.

The prestige and power of wealth lead to arrogance. People with money believe they are superior. They believe that they have succeeded in life merely by hard work, by superior ability, and by being an intrinsically better person than those less fortunate. While it is true that many people have become rich and famous mainly through their own efforts, it doesn't mean that they are somehow better people than those who haven't done as well.

The only thing worse than hoarding money while depriving others of basic needs is the disdain that many affluent people have toward people not as high on the socioeconomic totem pole.

Rich people perceive the poor and the homeless as being human garbage. This sort of condemnation only adds insult to injury and creates a society in which success is god, and in which hard circumstances supposedly indicate turpitude. In fact, those who hoard billions to themselves while depriving others are largely the true immoral ones.

In Defense of the Damned!

by George Wynn

Every time I hear or read
the geometry of negative angles
and meaningless words
of the mainstream media
disregarding the unhoused
as if they were wild animals
who should be chased out of town
I, George Wynn, feel myself
churning on the inside
and move into the
street-writing groove
and play the piano
on paper and sing and rant
as best I can
in defense of
the damned!

Burned Out!

by George Wynn

White as Wonder Bread
muscled, naked to the waist
bare feet
racing a shopping cart
covered with posters
of the Grateful Dead
down Market Street
with manic haste
as if he wants
to push time faster
and get away:
anywhere but here
tendons in his neck
screaming: "I'm on the
verge of breaking!"

"Unsightly"

by Joan Clair

Was it the sight of an "unsightly" man
like this one the Buddha saw,
inspiring him to give up his palace
of wealth and search for more?
An elderly, homeless gentleman
in the lobby of a library stoops down,
trying to gather himself together —
his paper bags, his clothes in rags
half on him, half on the floor.
I offer the man a sturdier bag of cloth.
The voice from the core of rags and bags
is educated, words enunciated clearly.
"No thank you," he says.
"No thank you," said the Buddha,
giving up all his possessions,
trying to transcend the pain of
sights like this one.

The Trauma Stare

by George Wynn

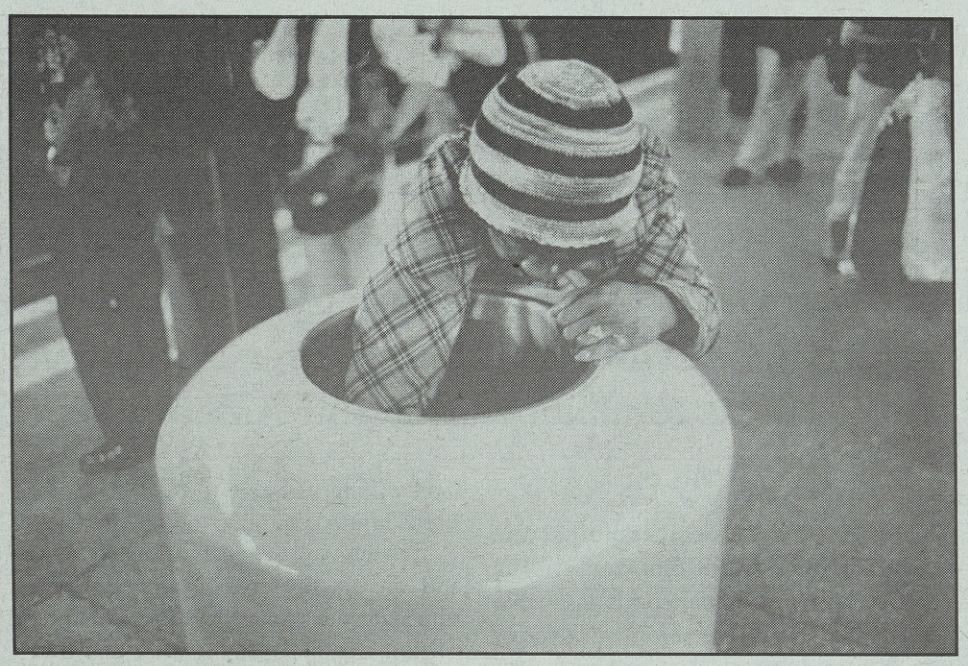
I look into my mother's eyes and see sadness for a time lost. She's hanging laundry on a Tenderloin rooftop in the 1950s, so mesmerized and confused by America she looks out into space for hours at a time after finishing her daily wash.

I see the same blank and weary look in contemporary chronic homeless souls on dreary and rainy days seeking shelter and sleep in the Metro and under Tenderloin and Market Street awnings.

My mother saw the world in the color green. She was beaten down by the time she came to America. Behind her eyes she was remembering Nazi green-uniformed soldiers in jackboots stealing loaves of bread from Jews on the streets of Krakow. She'd shake her soft hand before making a fist, sigh, then exclaim, "Oh how they beat them! Oh how they beat them!"

She would purse her lips for a few minutes, relax them, then look out trance-like with that trauma stare and forget I was there.

Some homeless folks have that stare. Combat photographers who dare to chance firezone fronts along the dance of war have captured the traumatic, "Near Catatonic" stare of American soldiers with too many tours of duty with weapons in their arms, reinforcing the lasting power of an overabundance of negative images in the human psyche.



A woman looks for meal in a trash can, ignored by the crowds. Photo credit: Dong Lin

Down on 8th Street

by George Wynn

Both of them
have long white hair
and hip pain
she is as tall as he

They limp along
Market Street
mile after mile
hand in hand
in the rain

Both of them
so quiet
on their way to
the Ferry Landing
for a bay ride
to Tiburon
their treat
of the week

Nothing has happened
to their application
for housing
It's always the
same old song:
wait till next year
but they still keep the faith

On 8th Street they
each drop four quarters
in a white haired lady's
outstretched cup
and he even tips his
Giants cap to her
which elicits a smile
from her and a
rattle of the cup

Remembering The Holocaust

by Claire J. Baker

Nazi guards engraved
a number on each
Jew's wrist
like branding hides
of rounded-up cattle.

Then
long crowded boxcars,
little air,
no sanitation —
the numbers
imprisonment, lice, rats,
starvation,
sexual abuse,
inhumane experiments.

Finally
gas steamed from
showerheads —
bodies incinerated
in round-the-clock ovens
or naked bodies shoveled
into mass graves —
horrors photographed
into eternal infamy
while the "outside" world
mostly wore a mask!

Night Steals Softly

by Karen Melander-Magoon

Night steals softly through the
city streets
Pads gently along urban roads
Covers chairs and tables in our home
Blankets the homeless
Lying in each archway
In each doorway
Blankets without warmth
But democratically
Night arrives for all of us
Consonant with skies
And spinning earth
Night sings the same song
Humming in our cortex
Velvet lullabies
Night comes as gentle mother
Draping layered veils
On presidents and paupers
Silkworms and silken gowns
Shivering children and sober lovers
Dumpsters and dandelions
Masons and musicians
Retreating in the darkening street
Or meeting for a dancing beat
A place inviting dancing feet
Night slides like toffee through the
darkening fog
Covering our faces, legs and arms
Until we too are night
We too become
A democratic state of mind
Invisible and indiscriminating
Creatures of a shadow land
Wrapped gently in a widow's veil
A blackened sail
A black cat's tail
All black
While night
Steals softly through
Our blinded minds
Extinguishing
All thought of sight
Extinguishing
All thought of light
Until we too
Become the night
Until we too
Become the night

War, Homelessness...

by Claire J. Baker

War, homelessness, poverty
can be made artistically moving —
even beautifully rendered in oils,
pastels, acrylics;
on movietown film; in black and white
and color photos; in true stories,
novels, visions; in rows of
soldier's boots on display on a lawn.

But friends, folks, fellow
countrywomen and men,
war, homelessness, poverty —
these scourges of civilization
are humanly, simply
and complicatedly
unacceptable!

Bag of Bones

by Mary Rudge

The skin grows looser,
and looser around me,
old bag, shaken up,
the jumble in my brain.
What hand is this, this destiny
in a land that has tossed me
like garbage.

The World Asks for Solutions

by Karen Melander-Magoon

The world asks for solutions
As children die
As children are exploited
Tortured, killed, left to wander
Along streets
That are no metaphor
For our journey
To understanding
Children do not live in metaphors
They live in a real world
Where they are hungry
And no one can feed them
Thirsty
And cannot find clean water
Hiding from drones
Ubiquitous drones
That kill without conscience
Or even awareness
Of their destructive
Robotic power
The world asks for solutions
End war
End greed
End capitalism
That creates war
That creates greed
Creates a world
Of robots
With no conscience
And no awareness
Of their violence
To children
Creates a world
Of chemical plants
And fracturing drills
And oil spills
And cancer
With no conscience
Or awareness
Of the death they bring
To all
Not just to children
The world asks for solutions
They are within
Its own grasp
Opened to give life
Opened to allow abundance
Opened to create
Opened to sustain again
Bring life again
Bring joy again
Bring peace again
To children
Bring peace again
To everyone

EPITAPH

by Mary Rudge

I woke to rain and bitter cold.
Hard ground was my bed.
And so soon was my name inscribed
On the wall of homeless dead.

A Day of Death

by Karen Melander-Magoon

One sunny day
Last year
A year old girl
And a baby boy
Were both shot
And killed
With guns
The little girl
Was on her nanny's back
Resting from learning
To walk
On her city block
The baby
Was in his stroller
Laughing
At the beautiful world
Around him
Eleven times
More school children
Are killed by guns in America
Than anywhere else
In the wealthy world
More children die
From gunfire
Than soldiers fighting
Foreign wars
There are nearly
As many guns
As there are people
In the United States
Half of the world's
Civilian firearms
Are here in the USA
Where twice as many
Black children
Die from guns
As in traffic accidents
Eight children die
Each day
From gunfire
The poor
Are the most likely
To die from guns
The children of the poor
Are the most likely
To die
Or go to prison
To be tried as adults
For shooting guns
Or be killed
For having toy guns
Of plastic
As they run and play
The answer
They say
Is more prisons
And more guns
More prisons
And more guns

Our Daily Bread

King Vidor's Depression-era film offered a utopian vision of social justice that championed the rights of workers. The vultures of the controlled press condemned it as anti-American.

by Mike Marino

King Vidor, director of the 1928 silent film classic, "The Crowd," turned his insatiable social consciousness loose once again in 1934, with the release of his cinematic indictment of the economic degradation of the Depression era, "Our Daily Bread" (originally called "Hell's Crossroads").

"Our Daily Bread" was an updated, non-sedated, "go for the jugular" sequel to Vidor's earlier film, "The Crowd," with different actors, and this time, with sound, a musical score and dialogue. It was the dawn of Hollywood's "talkies" and Vidor's film had a voice that spoke loud and clear in describing the plight of Americans in the richest land on the planet.

"Our Daily Bread" exposed economic injustice years before Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (published in 1939) put Tom Joad on the road, and countless others in search of work tried to survive by hopping rides like bolsheviks in boxcars, riding the "This Land Is Your Land, This Land Is My Land" Woody Guthrie rails.

Economic oppression and ruin were the devastating results of the Great Depression that put tremendous pressure on the people, while the dust storms and drought of the Dust Bowl destroyed the land and soil, dispossessing families from their generations-old heritage of farm life, property and honest labor. It was the worst of times, and, unlike Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities,* there were no best of times this time around.

"Our Daily Bread" utilized the same characters as "The Crowd," but this time with a new roster of actors who would reprise the roles in a fresh and unique way. Vidor was a passionate filmmaker who was excited about exposing conditions that create the indignities suffered when human rights are trampled.

Vidor approached movie mogul Irving Thalberg, boy genius of MGM studios, in an effort to gain his interest and persuade him to hand over the gold from the MGM vault to get the film produced and marketed to the public. Thalberg, however, was not interested. He wanted to entertain the public with Marx Brothers comedies and romantic comedies, and was not about to break formula and preach from a cinematic soapbox about the misery of the miserable who were growing in number in this former land of plenty while the soupline chorus broke out into a rousing refrain of "Brother Can You Spare A Dime."

Across the nation, prosperity gave way to handouts at backdoors, tramps and hobos were on the move, and families and children were starving to death. It was life without a net. A dazzling, dangerous, high-wire act that defied death usually ended up in death or, at the very least, broken dreams and spirits.

Vidor, his back literally against the economic wall, decided to produce the film himself, using whatever personal funds he had to funnel into the film project, but it was not enough to reach the finish line. Vidor then looked to a curious little tramp who walked with an arrogant waddle with his trademark hat and cane, a tramp with a social conscience by the name of Charlie Chaplin, who was more than willing and able to fund "Our Daily Bread" from beginning to "The End."

Needless to say, once it was completed and shown, the press attacked Vidor's film with the viciousness of a rabid dog, calling it pinko propaganda that had a faint, Soviet-Red tint due in large part to its "communal" message of survival, and the involvement of Charlie Chaplin, who had also gained a "pinko" rep. The film was released through Chaplin's United Artists Company, whose main offices were in Hollywood — not Moscow!

The storyline follows the exploits of John and Mary (sounds like check-in time at the No-Tell Motel), who are having a hard time during the hard times keeping their heads above water while swimming in the high-cost ocean of the high-rise city. They take what assets they have, cash out and hit the road, leaving New York far behind in the rearview mirror.

As luck would have it, Mary's uncle has offered them possession of a rough piece of farmland to work and live on. They feel they are up to the challenge, roll up their proletarian sleeves and take over the abandoned farm with mucho gusto and a rush of adrenalin. Remember now, these are born and bred city folks used to concrete canyons and apartments. Farming and land stewardship are as foreign to them as a conscience was to Sen. Joseph McCarthy in the '50s during the "red scare" hearings in America.

Gradually, as the farm takes shape and the land itself rejuvenates with new life and growth, John and Mary have an epiphany of sorts. They decide to establish a collective of others seeking shelter from the storm of the Great Depression. They had read all about the great Utopian experiments of the 19th century, and although these attempts were rarely successful, John and Mary feel they have the communal chutzpah to pull it off. So they put up signs advertising for men who need work and shelter in exchange for bartering the skills they can bring to the utopian table, such as carpenters, mechanics, or other talented workers who can help keep the collective machine well-oiled and operational.

Men on the move came across the farm, saw the signs posted there, and realized the opportunity awaiting them. As it turns out, John and Mary had made them an offer they couldn't refuse! It was a chance to share in the food and profits generated on the farm, while at the same time sharing in the workload and helping each other out. Sustainable living through brotherhood as a reality, well before it became a born-again Facebook buzzword!

In time, the cadre of comrades grows, the utopian Garden of Eden blossoms, and it's all for one, one for all. As the proletarian population grows, families now seek out the farm they had heard about. They are a diverse lot, including an Italian and a Jewish family who all pitch in. Later, in no-room-at-the-inn symbolism — the inn being American society and its intolerance for the poor — a Jewish child is born on the farm.

At one point, the cavalry arrives, in the form of a Swedish farmer who has been kicked off his own land and is now dispossessed. He joins the community and, with his vast agricultural expertise, begins to teach the enclave the secrets of farming, soil depletion, regeneration of soil, the common sense of land stewardship, and the importance of irrigation to fill in when Mother Nature cannot comply with ample water, and drought conditions retard the land and hold it hostage.

"Our Daily Bread" is not all soil, toil and trouble. Not by a long shot. You have to add a smidgeon of sex as an undertone in any socially conscious film — an affair that acts as a diversion from the mission of its protagonists, in this case, the completion of the irrigation ditch. The diversionary "she" is Sally who comes along and takes John for a short journey away from matrimonial sanctity with Mary, and also manages to divert John's own sexual irrigation ditch of needs, thereby leading him to neglect his duties as prime motivator of the group farm. His daily dalliance is now interfering with the daily bread of the commune!

Once John has his fill of tilling Sally's fertile soil, he gets back on track and tackles the construction of an irrigation ditch with the gusto of a kid at Christmas ripping open his presents in a frantic frenzy. Drought has hit the region like writer's block and it is imperative that the irrigation ditch be completed to salvage the farm and all the work they have put into it.

At one point, John is fed up with the project and feels it is a disaster. Mary is as astute as they come and realizes with her fine-tuned female intuition that Sally is responsible for John's discontent. Her instincts prove to be correct and John actually leaves the farm, briefly, with Sally in tow. Her gravitational pull is too strong for him to fight.

After a few sexual forays with Sally, John gets her out of his system, and decides that the group has to make the fields wet and productive. But a new wrinkle falls on the wizened face of circumstance when it's learned that a few mortgage payments have been missed and things are coming to a head. The land is to be auctioned off by the sheriff for non-payment of the mortgage.

During the auction, the prospective buyers have to face an angry line of faces of the soon-to-be landless, farmless, homeless farmers. Intimidated, the buyers back off and the farm is sold to one of the collective's members for under two bucks!

The team works diligently day and night to get the irrigation ditch dug and activated by diverting just enough water for their meager needs. Their backbreaking labor is successful and the life-giving water cascades over the soil and saves the crops, saves the day, and saves the farm.

By now, while water is filling the irrigation ditch, Sally is water under the bridge as John, once errant, now embraces Mary with all the gusto that a wandering husband can and should summon. While John and Mary make merry, in the fields the farm workers are celebrating with wild abandon, dashing and splashing in the water. In the end, the crops give forth a bounty unheard of and the communal spirit is alive and well.

The film moves as fast as a tornado in Kansas and is just as powerful with its message of collectivity and self-sufficiency, hard work and rewards. It is anti-corporate in scope and focuses on what can be attained by a group of hardworking individuals in time of need who, instead of whining about life, take adversity by the horns and turn it around through a proactive approach. That approach, of course, was considered anti-American and anti-capitalist when it came out. The vultures of the controlled press condemned it, no doubt at the behest or outright threat that radiated from the seat of power in Washington, D.C., and its dollar-a-holler whore — namely, corporate America's big business and banking institutes.

In the words of the utopian community: "We live! We love! We fight! We hate! What don't we do for — OUR DAILY BREAD!"